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on social protection and social inclusion
(2005/2097(INI))

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

Rapporteur: Edit Bauer

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on social protection and social inclusion (2005/2097(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication, entitled "Draft Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion" (COM(2005)0014),
- having regard to the Commission staff working paper, entitled "Annex to the Draft Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion" (SEC(2005)0069),
- having regard to the Commission staff working paper on social inclusion in the new Member States: a synthesis of the joint memoranda on social inclusion (SEC(2004)0848),
- having regard to the Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council of 22 and 23 March 2005,
- having regard to its resolution of 9 March 2005 on the mid-term review of the Lisbon strategy¹,
- having regard to the Presidency Conclusions of the Santa Maria da Feira European Council of 19 and 20 June 2000 and especially to the agreement that indicators should be defined as common references in the fight against social exclusion and the eradication of poverty,
- having regard to the Commission communication on the Social Agenda (COM(2005)0033),
- having regard to Council Decision 2005/600/EC of 12 July 2005 on Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States²,
- having regard to Decision No 50/2002/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 December 2001 establishing a programme of Community action to encourage cooperation between Member States to combat social exclusion³,
- having regard to Article 27(1) of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child by which the States Parties recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development,
- having regard to Article 27(2) and (3) of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child recognising parents' primary responsibility in this issue and governments' role in taking appropriate measures to assist them to implement this right and, in case of need,

¹ OJ C 320 E, 15.12.2005, p. 164.

² OJ L 205, 6.8.2005, p. 21.

³ OJ L 10, 12.1.2002, p. 1.

provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing,

- having regard to the Commission communication on Strengthening the social dimension of the Lisbon strategy: Streamlining open coordination in the field of social protection (COM(2003)0261),
 - having regard to the Commission communication on modernising social protection for the development of high-quality, accessible and sustainable health care and long-term care: support for the national strategies using the "open method of coordination" (COM(2004)0304),
 - having regard to the Commission Green Paper, entitled "Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations" (COM(2005)0094),
 - having regard to its resolution of 11 June 2002 on the communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Draft Joint Report on social inclusion¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 5 June 2003 on the application of the open method of coordination²,
 - having regard to its resolution of 24 September 2003 on the Joint Report by the Commission and the Council on adequate and sustainable pensions³,
 - having regard to its resolution of 28 April 2005 on modernising social protection and developing good quality health care⁴,
 - having regard to its resolution of 26 May 2005 on the Social Agenda for the period 2006-2010⁵,
 - having regard to its resolution of 9 June 2005 on social inclusion in the new Member States⁶,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (A6-0028/2006),
- A. whereas, at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, the European Union defined a comprehensive strategy aimed at long-term economic growth, full employment, social cohesion and sustainable development in a knowledge-based society based on know-how

¹ OJ C 261E, 30.10.2003, p. 136.

² OJ C 68E, 18.3.2004, p. 604-605.

³ OJ C 77E, 26.3.2004, p. 251.

⁴ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2005)0152.

⁵ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2005)0210.

⁶ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2005)0244.

and innovation; whereas five years later the objectives of the strategy remain far from being achieved,

- B. whereas, at the Nice European Council in 2000, the Member States undertook to show significant and measurable reduction of poverty and social exclusion by the year 2010,
- C. whereas social inclusion is a matter of human dignity, as a fundamental right,
- D. whereas, under certain conditions, social inclusion may make a direct and telling contribution to economic development,
- E. whereas social inclusion is a matter of social cohesion, as a basic value of the European Union and a tool for combating social exclusion and discrimination that means fighting against wasting human resources and the severe consequences of demographic changes,
- F. whereas, according to statistics from OECD sources, the population of the countries belonging to that organisation is ageing and, while there are currently 38 people in retirement for every 100 workers, if employment policy remains unchanged this figure could rise to as many as 70 people in retirement for every 100 workers,
- G. whereas the modernisation of social protection should not just be about ensuring financial sustainability, but sharing risks that individuals cannot face on their own and promoting economic growth and employment so as to make them sustainable,
- H. reaffirming, therefore, that social protection based on universality, equity and solidarity is an essential component of the European social model,

General points

1. Welcomes the abovementioned joint report which covers both social protection and social inclusion for the first time at the level of the EU-25 and which looks at the progress of the Member States in achieving objectives agreed by the Lisbon European Council; notes that the report aims at making key inroads into the fight against social exclusion and the eradication of poverty by 2010 and also at helping Member States to reform social protection systems with a view to ensuring their ability to provide high-quality services and their adequacy and sustainability in the future;
2. Notes that the joint report states that the fight against poverty and social exclusion remains a major challenge for the Union and its Member States, as the income-based figures relating to poverty and social exclusion across the Union are very significant, with more than 68 million or 15 per cent of the EU population living at risk of poverty in 2002;
3. Notes that, despite the important structural improvements in the EU labour markets over the last decade, EU employment and participation levels remain insufficient and unemployment remains high in a number of Member States, especially amongst certain categories of people, such as the young, older workers, women, and people with specific disadvantages; notes also that labour market exclusion has a national but also a local and regional dimension;

4. Draws attention to the fact that the recent economic slowdown, with rising unemployment and fewer job opportunities, puts more people at risk of poverty and exclusion and worsens the position of those already affected; this is particularly the case in some Member States that suffer from long-term unemployment or inactivity;
5. Emphasises that employment must be viewed as the most effective safeguard against poverty and, consequently, that the financial attractiveness of work should be maintained through incentives for employment of women and the setting of qualitative objectives for the jobs that are offered;

Social inclusion

6. Considers, in this regard, that efforts against poverty and social exclusion must be sustained and extended to improve the situation of those people most at risk of poverty and exclusion, such as those in casual employment, the unemployed, single parent households (usually headed by women), older people living alone, women, families with several dependants, disadvantaged children, as well as ethnic minorities, sick or disabled people, the homeless, victims of trafficking and victims of drug and alcohol dependency;
7. Considers that it is crucial to recognise the difficulties faced by people at a disadvantage, including disabled people, ethnic minorities and immigrants, in accessing or remaining on the labour market; calls on the Member States to support the integration of people at a disadvantage in order to prevent and combat social exclusion, as well as to promote education, encourage job creation, professional training and career development, the reconciliation of professional and family life and the right to equal access to health care and decent accommodation and ensure the sustainability of social protection systems; points in this regard to the necessity of improving comparable data;
8. Highlights the fact that tackling disadvantages in education and training and improving the qualifications of the labour force regardless of age, for men and women and ethnic and national minorities, are key tools for combating unemployment; notes also that addressing those inequalities is of particular importance for achieving the Lisbon targets regarding employment, quality of work and social inclusion;
9. Stresses in this respect that, as regards the Roma minority, it is desirable that members of that minority be given every motivation to have an interest in the further education of their children, the development of their children's positive qualities and skills, and the presentation of those qualities and skills to the wider public; considers that examples of successful Roma demonstrate that belonging to a particular ethnic group is not a handicap in a democratic society;
10. Calls on the Member States to exchange best practice to prevent early departure from education, raise the level of education, especially in languages and new technologies, facilitate the transition from school to work, increase access to education and training for disadvantaged groups, including less skilled and older workers, and lay the ground for access to lifelong learning for all; stresses that these strategies should involve all the stakeholders concerned, including the social partners, but also the civil society and learning providers;

11. Recommends that, in order to limit the exclusion of persons over the age of 50 and to help them remain on the job market, Member States guard against the risks of exclusion from the world of work by developing access to lifelong learning;
12. Considers in this respect that, given the benefits that a qualified workforce brings to employers, it goes without saying that employers should be more involved in the process of lifelong learning;
13. Points out, however, that in a number of cases neither a sufficient level of education nor repeated requalification guarantee employment; emphasises, therefore, the need to make greater use of not-for-profit public service work;
14. Stresses that in fourteen out of the seventeen Member States for which data are available¹ child poverty rose during the 1990s; draws attention to the fact that persistent child poverty mainly concentrates on single-parent families, large families with three or more dependent children, immigrants and people from ethnic minorities, unemployed or underemployed parents; stresses that priority attention at EU and Member State level should be given to the prevention and elimination of the intergenerational transmission of poverty and that this should be underpinned by appropriate financial resources (such as increased use of Structural Funds, especially the European Social Fund); underlines that indicators have to be approached from the child's perspective and that of people living alone, even if it is known that child poverty cannot be reduced without reducing household poverty and ensuring access to high-quality services for all;
15. Points out that, according to Eurostat sources, a third of births in the EU now occur outside the institution of marriage, and that this figure increases annually; considers that this trend bears witness to the need to find effective mechanisms to promote the proper functioning of different types of family as an institution;
16. Considers that social services dealing with children and childcare are an important precondition for the prevention and reduction of child poverty, social exclusion and discrimination, and the facilitation of the reconciliation of work and family life; stresses the need to ensure easy and equal access to education for all children; recognises the vital role of private operators in supplying services in this regard;
17. Calls on the Commission to put forward a Green Paper on child poverty, setting out clear targets and appropriate measures to eliminate child poverty, as steps towards the social inclusion of poor children;
18. Calls on the Commission to step up its efforts to introduce a 'Children's Charter' that seeks to achieve progress in upholding the rights of the child as part of the EU's internal and external policy;
19. Draws attention to the needs of young people, who face particular difficulties as regards economic and social integration)on leaving education and entering the world of work, and who are more susceptible to falling victim to social exclusion; calls on the Member States to ensure that youth unemployment is addressed specifically, as a priority in its own right, through specific policy measures and training, inter alia, to encourage of the taking of initiative and the development of entrepreneurial spirit;

20. Calls on the Member States to develop integrated strategies seeking to promote, in economic, social, cultural and environmental terms, the development of geographically remote and underdeveloped urban, island and rural areas, with a view to confronting the problems of exclusion and poverty, not allowing them to endure from one generation to the next;
21. Emphasises the need to increase the participation of women in employment by eliminating obstacles that prevent women from entering it, and particularly by encouraging older women to remain longer in the labour market;
22. Recommends that the Member States support a policy of growth and female employment by facilitating women's access to quality jobs and promoting equal-wage conditions;
23. Emphasises that increasing female activity rates must be viewed not only as a necessary safeguard against the risk of poverty, which primarily affects women, but also as a means to maintain the balance between the number of persons economically active and those inactive, which is endangered by the ageing of the population;
24. Calls, in this regard, on the Member States to focus on the elimination of inequalities on the labour market, such as gender gaps in employment, unemployment and atypical employment, gender segregation in sectors and occupations, gender pay gaps, unequal status and the limited participation of women in decision-making positions; considers that, in doing so, Member States should facilitate personal choices in terms of the reconciliation of work and family life and access to quality and affordable care services for children and other dependants; further believes that it is essential to ensure the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all policies and programmes;
25. Furthermore, calls on the Member States to take action to ensure that women are not penalised, when their pension entitlement is calculated, for gaps in their employment record caused by maternity leave or parental leave;
26. Calls on the Member States, in their fight against the high levels of exclusion faced by ethnic minorities and immigrants, to develop and implement measures, including measures to raise awareness, for the integration of these target groups into the formal labour market, to enforce anti-trafficking and anti-discrimination legislation, and to facilitate their social integration through specific provisions (and complex programmes relating to special educational programmes, and decent living and housing conditions, as a precondition for social inclusion);
27. Urges the Commission to put forward proposals aimed at setting up an appropriate legal framework to eradicate discrimination against people with disabilities, promoting equal opportunities and the full participation of such people in work, society and politics, specifically by means of a proposal for a directive based on Article 13 of the Treaty to cover the areas still not dealt with;
28. Stresses the need to improve housing conditions, especially accessibility, for those less-favoured groups which are particularly affected by poverty, such as people at a disadvantage and older people who cannot look after themselves; demands that more attention be paid to the homeless, especially by providing care, imparting basic skills, and

promoting social integration, which will necessitate public policies, especially in the areas of housing, health and education, to ensure that such people have access to those facilities;

29. Moreover, considers, in this respect, that such basic skills, the teaching of which would not only be aimed at cultivating the abilities people need in order to look after themselves but which would also instil solidarity with the less able, should be taught continuously to the whole of European society, starting during primary education;
30. Fully supports the Commission's intention to organise a European year of Equal Opportunities for All in 2007; considers that this should assist in highlighting the significance of the issue, assessing the progress achieved throughout the EU and providing a framework for further policy measures and initiatives with a view to enhancing the EU's anti-discrimination legislation, addressing direct and indirect discrimination and covering gender-equality in all areas;
31. Welcomes the recognition that the most socially deprived people generally experience the poorest socio-environmental conditions and that this should be given due consideration when tackling social exclusion;
32. Calls on the Commission to take legal action against Member States that do not apply or have failed to transpose by the deadline required the anti-discrimination Directives based on Article 13 of the EC Treaty;
33. Reaffirms the need for an improvement in harmonised data collection and the development of common indicators that take account of age and sex differences, as indicators of this kind play a major role in the monitoring and evaluation of policies on poverty and social exclusion;
34. Considers that a real mainstreaming of social inclusion in policy making should be implemented through the establishment of systematic *ex-ante* and *ex-post* policy assessments, both at national and EU level;
35. Points out that the social-inclusion process should truly involve key actors at local or regional level, such as local authorities in charge of social-inclusion policies, social partners, NGOs and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion;
36. Supports the intention of Commission to devote special attention to the task of combating poverty by organising the European Year of Combating Exclusion and Poverty;

Social protection

37. Considers that the rapid change arising from globalisation and the wide use of information and communication technologies increases the vulnerability to social risk and generates a need for more efficient measures of social protection with a view to ensuring the right of all to social protection;
38. Points out that social security and benefit systems are often slow to respond to more flexible forms of employment and self-employment and fail to offer appropriate support

and that this can prove a barrier to people taking up employment; considers therefore that this should be taken in to account when modernising systems;

39. Considers that the current demographic trends - ageing workforce and decline of the working-age population - constitute a challenge in the medium and longer term for the financial sustainability of social protection systems;
40. Points, in this regard, to the necessity of promoting the development and implementation of comprehensive ageing strategies aimed at empowering workers to stay active longer and encouraging employers to hire and retain older workers;
41. Urges the Commission to put forward proposals aimed at setting up an appropriate legal framework to eradicate discrimination against people on the basis of age;
42. Considers, in this respect, that the European Social Fund may have an important role to play in the integration and reintegration of older workers into the labour market, and, more generally, in the social inclusion of vulnerable and/or socially-excluded groups;
43. Considers that, in order for pension schemes to be financially sustainable, there is a need for economic growth and sufficient productivity, as well as high levels of employment and the active promotion of lifelong learning, quality of work and a safe and healthy working environment;
44. Recommends that pension systems should not only consist of a wide range of forms of social and supplementary insurance (whether statutory or private) but should also guarantee, to the greatest possible extent, social justice in pension systems;
45. Takes the view that, in order to prevent adverse effects on employment, reforms of public pensions systems should avoid increasing the total tax burden on labour, but achieve an appropriate balance between taxes on labour and taxes on other resources;
46. Calls on the Member States to reinforce administrative and institutional capacity, including the improvement of equal access to high-quality services, particularly, in the fields of health and long-term care, social security, social services, including the provision of counselling in social rights, child-related services, transport and mobility services, reintegration services focused on the labour-market integration, and vocational training services;
47. Awaits the Commission's document on minimum income as a potentially useful contribution to the debate on social inclusion and social protection;
48. Welcomes the Council's decision regarding the application of the open method of coordination in the field of health and long-term care; points out that the organisation and delivery of services and medical care is and should remain an area of Member State competence; reiterates its support for the three fundamental objectives of health and long-term care: universal access, irrespective of income or wealth, a high level of quality, and financial sustainability;

49. Stresses that particular attention should be paid to persons requiring long-term or expensive care, and to those facing particular difficulties in accessing care; emphasises that, if health is to be promoted and protected, health systems must be based not only on the insurance principle but also on the solidarity principle;
50. Advocates, furthermore, the increase of all those social services needed with regard to the care of dependent persons, i.e. those unable to perform basic everyday actions by themselves;
51. Notes that, although public pension schemes should remain an important source of pensioners' income, private provision through occupational or personal schemes can play a complementary role in obtaining additional pension entitlements;
52. Points out, in this context, the need for coordination of comprehensive information and monitoring systems highlighting the consequences for the income and living standards of individuals;
53. Stresses the importance of a continuous evaluation of pension systems' effectiveness with regard to their financial sustainability, as well as the achievement of social objectives;
54. Calls on the European Council, in the interest of streamlining and simplifying the open method of coordination, to adopt at its summit in Spring 2006 an integrated framework in the fields of social protection and integration and to agree on a uniform list of common objectives in the field of social integration, pensions, health and long-term care;
55. Regards the creation of an integrated framework and the streamlining of coordination in the fields of social protection and integration as an opportunity, in the context of the Lisbon process, to boost the social dimension of social protection as a dimension with its own independent socio-economic significance as opposed to the coordination of social and employment policy;
56. Calls on the Member States and the Commission, when applying the open method of coordination to social protection and integration, to pay greater attention in the future to issues of reconciling work and family life, with particular emphasis on access to childcare, family income situations and the employment rate of mothers;
57. Calls on the Member States to make optimal use of the potential offered by the open method of coordination process, as an instrument of policy making in the fields of employment, social protection, social inclusion, pensions and health;
58. Calls on the Member States - particularly the new Member States - to review their pension systems, taking account of the significantly lower life expectancy of men and the major pay differentials between men and women, which are reflected in the size of the pensions of widowed pensioners, often pushing them below the poverty line;
59. Points out that the development and maintenance of the social security systems is closely linked to the Lisbon goals and can make an important contribution to increased employment and growth, greater solidarity and better social integration;

60. Reiterates its conviction that its role in applying of the open method of coordination – in its capacity as the body directly representing the citizens of Europe – must be clarified and enhanced in order to give the process democratic legitimacy;
61. Calls on the Council and Commission to open negotiations with the European Parliament on an inter-institutional agreement setting out the rules for selecting the areas of policy to which the open method of coordination is to be applied, and providing for a coherent application of the method with the unrestricted and equal participation of the European Parliament;
62. Stresses that such an inter-institutional agreement must contain rules for the participation of the European Parliament in the setting of objectives and indicators and in access to documents, participation in meetings, observation and supervision of progress, information on reports and best practices, and a procedure enabling the open method of coordination to evolve into a Community method;
63. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Social Protection Committee, the Member States and the parliaments of the Member States, the accession countries and the candidate countries.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

I. Background and global overview

Tackling poverty and social exclusion is a strategic priority of the European Union since the European Council of Lisbon in March 2000 endorsed the Open Method of Coordination on social inclusion (OMC). The goal of the European Union is the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010. The OMC is based on a set of common objectives to be translated into national policy by Member States through two-year National Action Plans (NAPs). From 2006 onwards the OMC/social inclusion will be developed in a new streamlined framework encompassing pensions and possibly healthcare.

The Community Action Programme to combat Social Exclusion 2002-2006, with an initial budget of 75 million euros, is meant to support cooperation which enables the Community and the Member States to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of policies which combat social exclusion.

The joint report of the European Commission, issued on 27 January 2005¹, shows that **Member States are stepping up efforts to fight poverty and to ensure that pension systems remain capable of delivering adequate incomes to pensioners.** According to the Commission, Member States are more clearly focusing on key issues such as eliminating child poverty, improving housing conditions and raising school leavers' qualifications.

But overall, the report confirms that more than 68 million people, or 15% of the EU population, were living at risk of poverty in 2002 (which is defined as those living below a threshold of 60 percent of median national income), the unemployed, the homeless and women (single parents and the elderly living alone) being usually the most vulnerable. The percentage of those at a poverty risk range from 10% or less in the Czech Republic, Sweden, Denmark, Hungary and Slovenia to 20% or more in Ireland, the Slovak Republic, Greece and Portugal.

The Member States and the European Commission have identified a series of severe risk factors that increase the likelihood of being trapped in poverty, these being:

- long-term unemployment,
- low quality employment,
- poor qualifications and leaving school early,
- growing up in a family vulnerable to social exclusion, disability,
- poor health, drug abuse and alcoholism,
- living in an area of multiple disadvantage, homelessness and precarious housing,
- immigration, ethnic background and risk of racial discrimination.

That means that being in the trap of poverty is not primarily an individual failure.

¹ Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of regions: Draft Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (COM(2005)0014).

II. Key policy priorities

The report looks at the progress of the Member States in achieving objectives agreed by the European Council in 2000. It makes serious inroads into the eradication of poverty by 2010 and is intended to help Member States reform pensions to ensure that they are adequate and sustainable in the future.

The Commission stresses that modernisation of the economy should go hand in hand with efforts to reduce poverty and social exclusion. Member States are urged to give particular attention to seven key priorities over the next two years:

- promoting investment in and tailoring of active labour market measures to meet the needs of those who have the greatest difficulties in accessing employment;
- modernising social protection systems
- increasing the access of the most vulnerable and those most at risk of social exclusion to decent housing, quality health and lifelong learning opportunities; implementing a concerted effort to prevent early school leaving and to promote smooth transition from school to work;
- improving access to quality services;
- developing a focus on ending child poverty as a key step to stop the intergenerational inheritance of poverty;
- tackling educational disadvantage;
- initiating a drive to reduce poverty and social exclusion of immigrants and ethnic minorities.

As a consequence, Member States have to commit to the following:

- extending working lives and raising employment levels as key drivers of the modernisation of social protection
- stronger focus on implementation and synergies ahead of next year's planned extension to health care of social protection and social inclusion processes
- multi-faceted approaches and strategies continue to be a priority; key priority areas include preventing child poverty, supporting the caring capacities of families, addressing gender inequalities, tackling homelessness and opening new routes to integration of ethnic minorities and migrants
- considering how to make the national strategies more effective
- bringing people back to the labour market, maintaining workers in employment
- in the area of pensions, maintaining older workers in employment

III. Focus on Member States commitment

Member States are tackling social exclusion and poverty in different ways¹. For example, Ireland, Denmark and the UK are doing a lot to tackle **child poverty**. The Commission stresses the importance of eliminating child poverty in order to prevent it from being passed down the generations. The UK has one of the highest rates of child poverty. This is mainly because of the high number of single-parent households.

¹ Draft Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, Technical annex (SEC(2005)0069).

Some countries, for example Belgium, the UK and the Czech Republic, have a high number of households with no one in work and therefore **dependent on benefits**.

In the Netherlands, for example, the focus is on **combating poverty by getting more people into jobs**. The Commission endorses this but points that people with jobs can also suffer poverty.

Measures to improve **housing conditions** are gaining importance, e.g. in France, the Baltic States and Central and Eastern European countries. In some new Member States the housing stock is obsolete and inadequate. The Commission is keen to see policies across the EU to tackle **homelessness**.

Tackling **educational disadvantage** is a concern across the EU. Poland, Malta and Spain are three countries with high levels of early school-leavers. The new Member States generally have good performance in terms of basic educational attainment but gaps in tertiary education and life-long learning (e.g. skills training and re-skilling).

Moreover, **a particular attention should be given to the new Member States**. Even if some progress has been noted, a greater commitment must be reached. Indeed better and more specific priorities and targets need to be set, social protection systems need to be further modernised and the links with the broader national economic and budgetary policies need to be strengthened.

The average risk of poverty rate for the EU-10 (15%) is practically the same as that for the EU-25. At the same time, the figure varies widely among the EU-10, from 8% in the Czech Republic to 21% in Slovakia.

Some characteristics must be underlined:

- material deprivation and a subsistence lifestyle are common in the EU-10, due to substantially lower average income
- long-term unemployment is a major problem, in particular in Poland, Slovakia and the Baltic states
- negative natural population growth is also a major problem
- bad housing and health care conditions are common

With the exception of Slovenia, the new Member States' levels of expenditure on social protection as a proportion of GDP are significantly below the EU average. Furthermore, in its Report on social inclusion in the 10 new Member States¹, the Commission identifies six challenges the EU-10 States to face over the next two years:

- expand active labour market policies and develop coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies in order to increase labour market integration
- ensure that social protection systems have sufficient coverage and levels of payment to guarantee an adequate minimum income for all to live with dignity
- strengthen policies to tackle child and family poverty and to protect the rights of children

¹ Report on social inclusion 2005 - An analysis of the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (2004-2006) submitted by the 10 new Member States.

- improve access to decent housing and tackle homelessness
- invest more, and more efficiently, in order to improve the quality of and access to key public services (particularly health and social services, education, training and transport)
- step up efforts to overcome particularly high levels of exclusion and discrimination experienced by some ethnic groups, especially the Roma, and by people with disability.

IV. Critical policy issues

Finally, we consider that the three most critical social issues for the EU are life-long learning, technological gap and regional disparities.

Life-long learning

Investing in knowledge must be one of the top priorities of the Member States. Indeed life-long learning can be a very strong tool to fight poverty and social exclusion, as well as a major factor in promoting active citizenship and democracy. However, attention has to be paid to the fact that lifelong learning and access to training is available in a non-discriminatory way in order to assure an opportunity of a new beginning for everyone. The divide between high skill jobs and low skill/ low pay jobs is widening, with women and migrant workers mainly to be found on the low pay side. Measures to assure equal access to life-long learning have to be taken, as well as positive measures to explicitly promote disadvantaged people.

Technological gap

Societal changes could lead to new risks of poverty and social exclusion for particularly vulnerable groups unless appropriate policy responses are developed. These changes include changes in the labour market due to globalisation and the very rapid growth of the knowledge-based society and information and communication technologies.

Regional disparities

The opportunities for inclusion, particularly among children and youth, are highly unequal across space. Advantages and disadvantages have a compounding effect. In particular, areas where children grow up in poor and disadvantaged households are also often the areas where schools are of worse quality and in long distance, transport is inefficient, resulting deterioration of human capital and potential of development of region. These compounding processes develop partially on their own, but can be seriously compounded by government policies.

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on social protection and social inclusion
(2005/2097(INI))

Draftswoman: Věra Flasarová

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality calls on the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

- having regard to the Presidency Conclusions of the Santa Maria da Feira European Council of 19 and 20 June 2000 and especially to the agreement that indicators should be defined as common references in the fight against social exclusion and the eradication of poverty,
- A. whereas, according to statistics from OECD sources, the population of the countries belonging to that organisation is ageing and, while there are currently 38 people in retirement for every 100 workers, if employment policy remains unchanged this figure could rise to as many as 70 people in retirement for every 100 workers,
- B. whereas the 2005 Annual Report of the *United Nations* Population Fund states, among other things, that efforts to eradicate poverty throughout the world will not be successful unless measures are taken quickly to combat unequal conditions based on gender and increasingly commonplace sexual violence against women and the impunity enjoyed by its perpetrators,
- C. whereas combating the differential treatment of men and women must remain a priority in the social policies pursued by the European Union,
- D. whereas, in the countries of the EU, the percentage of people in danger of social exclusion is rising, as is the percentage of risk groups whose circumstances as regards integration into society are generally worse than those of other population groups,
- E. whereas women are under-represented in political decision-making bodies throughout the Union and, in some Member States and candidate countries, the percentage of women members of parliament is lower than the world average of 15,6%,

1. Recommends that the principle of gender mainstreaming be applied consistently when promoting the priorities in the area of social protection and social integration;
2. Emphasises that increasing female activity rates must be viewed not only as a necessary safeguard against the risk of poverty, which primarily affects women, but also as a means of maintaining the balance between the number of persons economically active and those inactive, which is endangered by the ageing of the population;
3. Reaffirms the need not only to gather but also to analyse comparable and reliable information and statistics, broken down if possible by age and gender, on poverty and social exclusion, especially that affecting under-privileged sectors of the population, and on the implementation of gender equality; recommends that heightened importance be attached to the assessments that the future Institute for Gender Equality could provide on the basis of such information and statistics;
4. Recommends that Member States support a policy of growth and female employment by facilitating women's access to quality jobs and promoting equal wage conditions;
5. Calls on Member States and the Commission to take action to eradicate child poverty in order to prevent it continuing from one generation to the next, and to promote children's rights, including the right to education and to adequate health care; emphasises that children from single-parent families, or whose parents are not economically active or are unemployed, as well as children with many siblings, are particularly vulnerable, and that Member States should consequently be invited to develop policies aimed at eradicating social exclusion when it impacts on children;
6. Points out that, according to Eurostat sources, a third of births in the EU now occur outside the institution of marriage, and this figure is growing annually. This trend bears witness to the need to find effective mechanisms promoting the proper functioning of different types of family as an institution;
7. Points out that the risk of poverty is significantly higher for the unemployed, single parent households (mainly headed by women), older people living alone (also especially women) and families with several dependants; stresses that children who grow up in poverty are more likely to suffer from poorer health, do less well educationally and are at a higher risk of future unemployment;
8. Recommends that Member States pursue a sustained policy on employment aimed at supporting flexibility, maintaining the quality of employment and ensuring that criteria of equal treatment between the sexes are met in the context of recruitment, access to training and career advancement;
9. Invites the Member States to take specific measures in their social and economic policies to encourage the social integration of disadvantaged persons, including single-parent families, large families, the disabled, ethnic minorities and immigrants; these measures should cover, inter alia, the combating of all types of discrimination, improved access to employment, professional training and career development, the reconciliation of professional and family life and the right to equal access to health care and decent accommodation;

10. Calls on the Commission to ensure a follow-up to the 1992 recommendation on minimum guaranteed income to be provided by Member States' social protection systems within the context of an overall policy to promote the economic and social integration of those receiving that benefit;
11. Emphasises that employment must be viewed as the most effective safeguard against poverty and consequently that the financial attractiveness of work should be maintained through incentives to female employment and setting qualitative objectives for the jobs that are offered;
12. Points out that in order to guarantee the continued financing of social protection systems, including pensions, increasing longevity should be accompanied by strategies to promote the active ageing of workers, on the one hand, and by an improvement in the quality of life for all on the other, as expressed, inter alia, in an adaptation of the rhythm and quality of work and in equal access to services, including health care and social security services, as well as to education and vocational training;
13. Recommends that, in order to limit the exclusion of persons over the age of 50 and to help them remain on the job market, Member States guard against the risks of exclusion from the world of work by developing access to lifelong learning;
14. Recommends that pension systems should not only consist of a wide range of forms of social and supplementary insurance (whether laid down by law or private) but should also guarantee, to the greatest possible extent, social justice in pension systems;
15. Points to the importance of involving in the social inclusion process all the players concerned at national, regional and local level, social partners, non-governmental organisations and civil society, and encourages the Member States to harness in full the possibilities offered by the open method of coordination procedure in this area;
16. Emphasises, moreover, that young people are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion owing to the difficulties which confront them on leaving education and entering the world of work; recommends, therefore, that Member States develop measures aimed specifically at young people and especially at those who face difficulties in the transition from education to employment, who are not in the education system or who have no training;
17. Points out that an active social policy and the preservation of the welfare state are among the fundamental objectives that the European Union must pursue in the context of globalisation and international economic competition;
18. Recommends that Member States work towards the development of social monitoring systems enabling any person in serious difficulty to be attended to and provided with information, guidance and housing solutions;
19. Suggests going more deeply into issues of social integration, particularly as regards immigrants from culturally different regions of the world whose cultural values and traditions in certain respects may not correspond to the attitudes accepted in the countries of the EU. These differences may give rise to friction and misunderstandings, making it

harder to integrate these very groups of people which, as can be seen from current events in Europe, is particularly the case with the younger generation.

PROCEDURE

Title	Social protection and social inclusion
Procedure number	2005/2097(INI)
Committee responsible	EMPL
Committee asked for its opinion Date announced in plenary	FEMM 9.6.2005
Enhanced cooperation	No
Drafts(wo)man Date appointed	Věra Flasarová 20.6.2005
Discussed in committee	28.11.2005 24.1.2006
Date suggestions adopted	24.1.2006
Result of final vote	for: 19 against: 0 abstentions: 0
Members present for the final vote	Edit Bauer, Věra Flasarová, Claire Gibault, Lissy Gröner, Zita Gurmai, Piia-Noora Kauppi, Urszula Krupa, Pia Elda Locatelli, Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, Teresa Riera Madurell, Raül Romeva i Rueda, Amalia Sartori, Anna Záborská
Substitutes present for the final vote	Mary Honeyball, Christa Klaß, Zita Pleštinská, Zuzana Roithová, Heide Rühle, Bernadette Vergnaud
Substitutes under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	

PROCEDURE

Title	Social protection and social inclusion	
Procedure number	2005/2097(INI)	
Basis in Rules of Procedure	Rule 45	
Committee responsible Date authorisation announced in plenary	EMPL 9.6.2005	
Committee asked for opinion Date announced in plenary	FEMM 9.6.2005	
Rapporteur Date appointed	Edit Bauer 31.3.2005	
Discussed in committee	22.11.2005 25.1.2006	
Date adopted	26.1.2006	
Result of final vote	for: 40 against: 0 abstentions: 1	
Members present for the final vote	Jan Andersson, Roselyne Bachelot-Narquin, Emine Bozkurt, Iles Braghetto, Philip Bushill-Matthews, Milan Cabrnock, Derek Roland Clark, Luigi Cocilovo, Jean Louis Cottigny, Harlem Désir, Harald Ettl, Richard Falbr, Carlo Fatuzzo, Joel Hasse Ferreira, Roger Helmer, Stephen Hughes, Karin Jöns, Jan Jerzy Kułakowski, Sepp Kusstatscher, Jean Lambert, Bernard Lehideux, Elizabeth Lynne, Thomas Mann, Ana Mato Adrover, Maria Matsouka, Ria Oomen-Ruijten, Csaba Öry, Siiri Oviir, Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, Pier Antonio Panzeri, Jacek Protasiewicz, José Albino Silva Peneda, Kathy Sinnott, Gabriele Zimmer	
Substitutes present for the final vote	Edit Bauer, Lasse Lehtinen, Jamila Madeira, Marianne Mikko, Leopold Józef Rutowicz, Elisabeth Schroedter, Patrizia Toia, Tadeusz Zwiefka	
Date tabled – A6	8.2.2006	A6-0028/2006